

Getting Out the Vote

PSAs, Hip-Hop Summit Led Successful “Be Powerful, Be Heard” Campaign; NJ Added 463,000 New Voters; 73% Turn-Out for 2004 Election Best in Many Years

Attorney General Peter C. Harvey (above, second from left) responds to a student question during the live, interactive “Web cast” phase of the April 2004 kick-off event for New Jersey’s “Be Powerful, Be Heard” pro-voting campaign. With AG Harvey are actor William Baldwin (left), popular music impresario Russell Simmons (immediate right) and The Reverend Run, formerly “Run” of the hip-hop recording act Run-DMC (far right).

Held at the War Memorial in Trenton (opposite page), the September 2004 Hip-Hop Summit drew nearly a thousand voting-age young people from throughout the State, and was seen via Internet Web cast by thousands more. The Summit brought together top hip-hop recording artists and representatives of government, as well as voting-age and soon-to-be-voting age students for a candid discussion about democracy, governance and the electoral process.



The statewide awareness campaign that would mobilize New Jersey’s young people and spark the State’s largest General Election turn-out in more than a decade began on April 7, 2004.

On that day, a diverse collection of celebrities from the worlds of film, hip-hop music and television joined Attorney General at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark for the kick-off of the State’s “Be Powerful, Be Heard” voter awareness drive.

The impressive list of celebrities on hand to launch the “Be Powerful, Be Heard” campaign included hip-hop music impresario Russell Simmons, actor William “Billy” Baldwin, and The Reverend Run — formerly “Run” of the pioneering 1980s rap act Run-DMC. Also attending were comedian Joe Piscopo, star from NBC’S Saturday Night Live, and featured cast members from HBO’s runaway hit TV series “The Sopranos,” including actors Al Sapienza and Federico Castelluccio. The celebrities — virtually all of whom were either born in New Jersey or had some other connection to the state — offered formal remarks about the importance of voting, and took part in an interactive program that linked them for discussion with elementary, middle, high school and college students throughout the state via live Internet video stream.

Well-attended and packed with star

power, the “Be Powerful, Be Heard” kick-off was by any measure a success, but it was only the beginning.

Using funding obtained through the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA), the Attorney General’s Office continued working throughout 2004 to spread awareness about the importance of voting, to disseminate useful information concerning how to register to vote, and to ensure that the voting process in New Jersey is as inclusive and user-friendly as possible.

Ultimately, the State registered 463,000 new voters in time for the 2004 General Election, pushing New Jersey’s total number of registered voters beyond the 5 million mark, and setting the stage for a Presidential Election Day turnout of 73 percent - the highest voter turn-out in the state since 1992.

Highlights from 2004 included:

❖ **Celebrity Public Service Announcement (PSA) Campaign** —

Through an ambitious campaign to recruit celebrity volunteers from the worlds of music, movies and sports, the Attorney General’s Office filled the airwaves, the Internet, and even first-run movie screens with compelling celebrity appeals to “Be Powerful, Be Heard” by voting in 2004. Actor and Newark native Jason Alexander, best known for his role

as “George Costanza” in the popular TV comedy “Seinfeld,” was among the first celebrities to donate his time to the cause. Amusing and informative, the Alexander PSA ran not only on television, but aired on 147 movie screens across New Jersey. A series of equally effective volunteer PSAs followed — produced in English and Spanish — featuring a cross-section of stars including hip-hop recording artist and actress Queen Latifah, actor Michael Douglas, rappers MC Lyte and Doug E. Fresh, NBA basketball star Kenny Anderson, and urban contemporary radio personality Angie Martinez. The PSA campaign continued into 2005, with the PSAs on a Web page devoted to HAVA, www.NJElections.org/hava_doe.html.

❖ **Hip-Hop Summit** —

In September, the Attorney General's Office joined with Russell Simmons' Hip-Hop Action Network to stage the first-ever New Jersey Hip-Hop Summit at the War Memorial in Trenton. The Hip-Hop

Summit was a major get-out-the-vote event that brought together top hip-hop recording artists and representatives of government, as well as voting age and soon-to-be voting-age young people for a candid discussion about democracy, governance, and the significance of every individual's voting voice. The event packed the War Memorial's main theater with cheering students, and was made available for Web cast viewing by thousands of students watching at high schools and colleges throughout New Jersey. As a result of the Hip-Hop Summit, an estimated 3,000 new voters were registered in time for the 2004 General Election.

❖ **Voting Technologies Forum** —

Also held at the War Memorial in Trenton, the “Beyond 2004: Exploring Voting Technologies” forum brought together a host of experts on voting systems from government and academia. The program was open to the public, and included a panel discussion focused on electronic vot-

ing systems, including the pros and cons of voting machines equipped with “verified paper trail” capability. Held one week before the General Election, the Voting Technologies Forum provided the public with an opportunity to witness a demonstration of an electronic voting machine currently in use, and provided useful information on the capabilities of emerging voting system technologies. Well covered by local and regional media, the event enabled the Attorney General's Office to keep voting-related information and issues in the public eye.

Register and Vote, New Jersey!



Shown here are some of the stars who have volunteered their time to film public service announcements. From left: Michael Douglas, Queen Latifah, Jason Alexander and Angie Martinez. Visit www.NJElections.org to see additional celebrity PSAs.

